



*Borough of Merchantville
New Jersey*

FRANK M. NORTH
MAYOR
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July 18, 2010

Merchantville – Cherry Hill Merger

Dear Resident,

As you may or may not know, there has been talk by some residents to merge the Borough of Merchantville with Cherry Hill Township.

Petitions have been circulated along with door drop notifications claiming 600 to 700 signatures were collected and that everyone should attend the monthly borough council meetings to have your voices heard.

The June 14 council meeting was attended by 60 to 70 people, at which time a petition with 467 signatures was presented to me and council.

During the meeting's public portion, some of those in attendance expressed their concern as to the borough's economic future, elementary school cutbacks due to the governor's mandates reducing budgets and the sending/receiving agreement with the Pennsauken Public School District and its high school. Many of those speaking felt that we had to immediately merge with Cherry Hill before it's "too late."

Although there is much frustration with the reduction of State Aid to all municipalities and school districts, from what I've heard from residents, I feel the petition is being driven by the sending/receiving policy which directs Merchantville's high school students to Pennsauken High School.

Many of those speaking that evening were parents of young children and/or had only moved into town within the last four to six years. There were also several older residents who thought a merger with Cherry Hill would help reduce their property taxes and that a study to consider the pros and cons of municipal consolidation should be considered.

It was at this meeting that I agreed along with Borough Council to initiate formal contact with Cherry Hill Township to explore the possibility of a merger. As a result, I and two borough officials met with Mayor Platt and his representatives at Senator James Beach's office for the purpose of discussing this subject.

However, it's important to remember the merging of towns is not as simple as saying "yes let's do it."

Please allow me to give you a very basic overview of the process.

The first step in this process is the presentation of this issue to the residents of both municipalities, to determine if there is interest in consolidation. That is done by referendums in both municipalities to authorize the creation of a joint consolidation commission to evaluate the feasibility of a merger. If both municipalities approve the creation of the commission, the process moves forward. If one or both of the referendums are defeated by the voters of the individual municipalities, the process ceases.

If, by referendum, both municipalities authorize the creation of this commission, an evaluation to determine the feasibility of such a merger must be conducted by an outside third party, as selected by joint commission from both Merchantville and Cherry Hill. The cost to perform this study is expected to exceed \$100,000, which could possibly be funded with a grant from the State or split equally between Merchantville and Cherry Hill. Should the State be unable to fund the undertaking. At the same time, the State conducts its own study to determine if the merger is financially feasible.

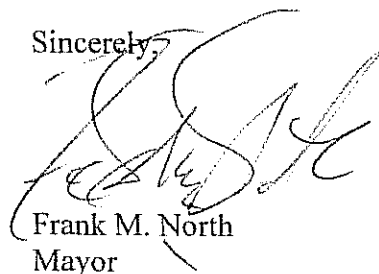
The study would consider issues such as: form of government structure, representation of Merchantville on Cherry Hill's council, property evaluation and taxes, assumption of any municipal debt, possible dissolution of police and fire safety, the status of road and infrastructure, public properties like the school, municipal buildings, and parks.

After these studies are conducted, the results would be presented to both governing bodies and residents. At that point, the commission, based upon these studies, will make its recommendation as to whether (or not) a merger is in the best interest of Merchantville and Cherry Hill. The matter, again, would be put to vote by residents in both communities as to whether a merger of the municipalities should occur. If both communities vote in favor, the necessary steps to merge would be taken; however, if one of the communities votes the merger down, it becomes a dead issue.

At the current point in time, I am waiting on a response from Senator Beach's office on funding for the study. As we await a response and can identify a clear direction in which to proceed, I continue to welcome all residents to attend our council meetings and share their questions, concerns and opinions.

Additional information as it becomes available on this issue will be available on the Borough's recently launched official website www.merchantvilleni.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frank M. North', is written over a horizontal line.

Frank M. North
Mayor